

Stronger Together and People and Organisational Development collaboration



'We believe that everyone should have the opportunity to participate in society and influence decisions'

Summary

Under a banner of '#Stronger Together Thurrock' we have established a training support programme to ensure our thriving group of Community Hubs are fully supported. Through the hard work and dedication of a number of organisations working in partnership we have ensured that over 250 volunteers have experienced our support programme.

all working together to effectively manage local issues, influence their community and deliver a sustainable programme of support. By working in partnership and ensuring these Volunteers are supported in their roles, we are ensuring that our Community Hubs are delivering significant difference to our residents

Our effective training programme was established to ensure our volunteers have the skills and knowledge to support their community and fellow residents.

Our recent residents survey told us that community cohesion is strong – 69% of residents agreed or strongly agreed that they belong to and identify with their local area; with 37% who give the name of their village as the place they live (not the Borough, or Essex)

This highlights the vital role that Community Hubs play - their great attraction is the significant role they play in deciding on local priorities for action.

The challenge

The established principles for community hubs are to:

1. Reduce demand on statutory services by working with communities to design more holistic and effective community based solutions to issues in their area.
2. Build stronger communities that are better equipped to support people locally, galvanise community spirit and unleash community led action to achieve a locally agreed vision for communities.
3. Articulate an area's vision and priorities, supporting public services plan effectively between residents, councillors, public services and business.

The hubs programme helps to provide effective ways of supporting residents, and can enable services to be delivered in a more person focused and efficient way.

With six thriving Community Hubs all staffed with a willing group of volunteers the challenge was to ensure they were supported with skills and knowledge to be effective at providing local support, confident in their role and able to deal with questions and queries from their community.

The solution

Working in partnership with a number of local organisations:

- 1) 'Stronger Together' promotes local, community activities that strengthen the connections between people. Stronger Together also encourages local people to have a greater say in what happens in their neighbourhood and to take control over where they live and the decisions that affect them
- 2) Ngage - a **Thurrock** based organisation aimed at promoting active citizenship and volunteer opportunities in **Thurrock**, and encourage them to play a bigger part in their local community and get involved in local decision making
- 3) Thurrock OD team – working with local organisations to shape and deliver an effective development programme for our volunteers which meets the needs of our community and drives a digital solution

To ensure a consistent focus on the skills and confidence of our Volunteers and to ensure successful growth of our Community Hubs we developed a community hubs training programme, co-produced between the Council HR OD team with the community and voluntary sector led by Thurrock Council for Voluntary Services (TCVS).

The first rolling programme of training was delivered in June 2015. There are four core elements of training that repeat over a two month period. Volunteers who are happy to assist people with digital by design activities can access additional training such as Thurrock Choice homes, Universal Credit etc to support them in their role.

The aim of the rolling training programme is to support hub volunteers with the skills and knowledge needed to help them to support local communities, and help to

increase their personal development and employability skills. Volunteers are required to attend all four core training modules as part of a rolling programme, and receive a certificate once they have completed them. A training record is held for each volunteer and updated as more training is taken.

Volunteers are recruited to support the development of hubs across Thurrock. Opportunities and roles are also promoted as a way for people to get to know others in their community, give something back, decide on local priorities and take effective action. The training programme we developed has been created to support all of these key aspects and also provides a route to increase employability.

Our Volunteers undertake various roles in the hubs such as meeters and greeters, booking coordinators, website/social media, providing online assistance on Thurrock Choice Homes/Universal Credit. The specific development created supports the delivery of all of these elements.

Close collaboration between our OD team, Ngage and Stronger Together means that the training is reviewed to ensure its continuing relevance and we can drive a consistent use of digital systems with easy access to our Thurrock Learning Zone.

Training Partnership

hub volunteers core training modules include: -

1. Introduction to Community Hubs
2. Customer Services
3. Safeguarding yourself and others
4. Thurrock Libraries Information and Advice
5. Thurrock Choice Homes
6. Universal Credit

Thurrock training team and in-house subject matter experts deliver modules 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6.

Once volunteers complete their course modules they are given access to an online portal (hosted by Thurrock Council with their Thurrock learning Zone). This portal gives them access to the material supporting the core modules to use a refresher. It also gives them access to other topic areas.

- An online member's forum. This Forum has been set up for Community Hub volunteers to communicate and share ideas and information with other hub volunteers.
- Additional Training to support them as a community hub volunteer.
 - A range of self-directed learning around supporting people such as 'empathy' and 'advocacy'. Practical skills such as 'decision making' and 'listening skills'. Mental health awareness such as 'depression'. Health awareness such as 'epilepsy' and 'diabetes'.
- Other training to support their personal develop and employability skills.

The whole solution ensures a practical effective support programme is delivered at a local level making a real difference to the skills and confidence of our communities – our collaboration and partnership approach ensures that they can support each other to access the services they need.

Benefits / Outcomes from the volunteers about the core programme

The volunteers value all the training they get and feel it better prepares them to be a productive volunteer within their particular hub.



The feedback from volunteers is that they find the core training very informative and that it gives them the confidence to do their role in the hub. Their feedback has told us:

“Good Fun session whilst learning so much. Very informal which was nice – everyone chatted and engaged with each other well done”

“We had a very good and informative session which went a long way in reinforcing good customer service and I liked the way it supports the whole community hub set up”

“Very enjoyable afternoon. I learnt quite a lot about being a volunteer at the hub”

“I am now more informed more on everything we covered”

“I feel more confident about my role as a volunteer and have offered to help another hub with craft sessions”

“Nice real axed atmosphere. Very thorough coverage of all aspects of serving the public. Pros and cons – dos and don’ts all covered”.

“I found today’s session to be very interesting, it was good to hear about the various aspects of customer service all in one session. It was also good to hear real life examples from other volunteers. The sharing of experience was beneficial. The

trainer was very enthusiastic and well presented, very suitable for this type of training"

(word count 1,253)

Appendix 1 - Core Programme

Compulsory core training

Module 1: Introduction to community hub volunteering

(A 30 minute session that - ideally – is delivered with Customer Service , but it can be added at the beginning of any of the core trainings depending on the point of entry for the new volunteer into the rolling programme).

- Background to community hubs and core aims
- Volunteer roles and responsibilities
- Brief explanation of safeguarding for volunteers
- Timebanking

Module 2: Customer service

- Communication skills
- Making a good impression
- Customer service skills
- Equality and diversity and recognising individual needs
- Dealing with difficult behaviour and complaints

Module 3: Safeguarding yourself and others - delivered by Thurrock Council

- Understand what abuse is
- Understand vulnerability
- Understand your own vulnerability as a volunteer
- Understand the potential signs and indicators of abuse
- Understand what to do if you suspect abuse is happening

Module 4: Information and advice including websites – delivered by Thurrock Libraries

- What information the library can provide both online and within the buildings.
- How to help residents
- Log onto computers and print documents
- How to book sessions on the computers using the Self Service Machines
- Issue and return books using the Self Service Machines
- Simple introduction to Copyright

Digital by design training sessions

These trainings are for volunteers who wish to assist people in completing forms or providing additional IT support. Only Option 1 and 2 will be part of the rolling programme. Other options will be delivered as necessary to support Community hub requests.

Option 1: Thurrock Choice Homes

1. Eligibility criteria on who can go on to the register
2. How to access Thurrock Choice Homes
3. How to complete an application
4. Problems with an application
5. How to bid for properties

Housing and Council Tax application

1. How to set up a new email account
2. Eligibility criteria
3. Where to claim
4. How to claim
5. Problem with applications

Option 2: The Universal Credit -

1. Welfare Reform Act 2014
2. Explain what UC is
3. Explain what benefits are covered and the ones that are not included.
4. How to claim
5. Eligibility criteria
6. Problems with UC and how to overcome them